

The Iraq dilemma: An illegitimate occupation

by [George Hunsinger](#) in the [November 1, 2003](#) issue

The unfinished war in Iraq is the war that keeps on killing. Not least, it keeps on killing American troops. The death toll for American soldiers is steadily mounting. Last summer the Associated Press reported that attacks on U.S. forces were occurring “almost hourly—too frequent for military press officers to keep up with,” and the situation has not improved. Our soldiers are still being killed on the average of 1.2 per day. More troops have died in the second phase of this war than during the first.

And this war keeps on killing civilians, especially children. Nearly 10,000 innocent civilians perished in the first phase of this ill-considered war, along with perhaps 30,000 Iraqi soldiers, many of whom were teenage conscripts. Today Iraq is in a humanitarian crisis. The rate of child mortality—already among the highest in the world during the past 12 years—has grown even higher. The country is so lacking in stability that aid agencies like the International Red Cross, Save the Children and Oxfam have taken the virtually unprecedented step of evacuating their workers. The reigning instability suggests that the occupation forces do not control the country—and that their days are numbered.

We now know that government and military officials grossly underestimated the problems they would face in conquering and occupying Iraq. They were prepared to take care only of what was most important to them. Baghdad’s Ministry of Oil was quickly secured while the museums were ransacked, the universities destroyed, the bureaucracies reduced to rubble, the police forces dismantled and the libraries torched into flame. An alienated population and ever-increasing guerrilla warfare loom large upon the horizon.

The terrible quagmire we are entering is matched only by the depth of denial in Washington. Our government needs to swallow its pride, for the good of all concerned, and follow the advice of France and Germany by turning Iraq’s reconstruction over to the United Nations. To call France and Germany our enemies,

as certain pundits have done, is like calling someone an enemy who takes car keys away from a drunk.

Everything that antiwar critics said about the U.S. invasion of Iraq has turned out to be true. Before the invasion they argued that Iraq posed no imminent threat to the U.S., that it was not directly linked to the war on terrorism, that an invasion might make the terrorism problem worse, that there was no international coalition supporting the war and that there were other ways to contain Saddam Hussein. If the U.S. continues down its current path, it will be a matter of months, not years, before it is forced out of Iraq in defeat. The situation could unravel into chaos at any time. Every death in this war is unnecessary, because the war was unnecessary.

Critics were also correct to charge that the case for the war was based on distortion and deception. After five months of occupation, no weapons of mass destruction have been found. The claim that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons which could be launched in just 45 minutes has been exposed as a fraud, one that threatens to bring down British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The scare perpetrated by President Bush that Iraq had imported uranium from Niger, which could be used for nuclear weapons, was based on forged documents; their worthlessness was known at the time by U.S. intelligence but ignored by the administration. The innuendo, repeatedly made by the administration, that Saddam Hussein was linked to September 11 has only recently been retracted now that it has served its purpose. The claim about Saddam's alleged ties to al-Qaeda awaits retraction. Not surprisingly, a large percentage of the American public still believes these toxic myths. Yet their falsehood, now more widely recognized, was demonstrated repeatedly prior to the war.

To those who say it doesn't matter if no weapons of mass destruction are found, because at least the world has been rid of a vicious dictator, there is an obvious reply: Yes, Iraq is better off now that Saddam is gone. But even conservative columnist George Will acknowledged that this argument is not good enough. There are about 70 other regimes in the world as dreadful as Saddam's, and we cannot go to war against them all.

Since the war was illegitimate, the U.S. has no legitimacy in trying to dictate the shape of reconstruction. Above all, it has no right to turn Iraq into a staging ground for new "preemptive" wars. Therefore:

- 1) Any new UN resolution should be opposed which simply serves to legitimate the U.S.-led occupation. No countries should send troops or funds that would merely “internationalize” the existing foreign rule.
- 2) Only after the U.S.-led occupation has ended should the UN return to Iraq with multinational peacekeeping forces. Its mandate should be restricted to a very short and defined period. Its goal would be to assist Iraq in reconstruction and to oversee the election of a governing authority.
- 3) The humanitarian needs of Iraq must be met, as international law requires, by the belligerent powers that initiated the war and now occupy the country.
- 4) All contracts awarded to U.S. corporations by the administration without competitive bidding must be revoked. Rampant crony capitalism with corporations like Halliburton, which is positioned to receive \$7 billion over the next two years, must be abandoned in favor of support for indigenous Iraqi businesses and expertise.
- 5) The plans to establish four permanent military bases in Iraq from which future wars can be launched must be blocked.

In short, everything depends on wresting the reconstruction of Iraq away from the militarists and the profiteers.

The Slovenian cultural theorist Slavoj Zizek has suggested that Americans suffer from “a will to ignorance.” A will to ignorance implies a troubled conscience. Americans don’t want to hear about it if our government kills and impoverishes people in order to maintain global dominance. Churches desperately need preaching that will help America face its flaws, heal its wounds and change its values.

See also [The Iraq dilemma: America's obligation](#), by Martin L. Cook.